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MUD & GUTS

A look at the common soldier of the American Revolution

BILL MAULDIN

"I forget . . . are we advancing or retreating?"

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Published on the Occasion of the 200th Anniversary
of the Encampment at Valley Forge

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Foreword

Early in 1974 the National Park Service asked me to prepare, for publication, an informal study in text and cartoons of our Revolutionary troops, with particular emphasis on the life of the common foot soldier. Flattered by the request and fascinated by this Bicentennial project, I agreed.

Although I'm not much of a historian and even less a scholar, I suppose I felt qualified for the task because of my five-year association with the infantry in World War II—during which I produced some 500 soldier cartoons and several books on the subject—and a nodding acquaintance with three subsequent conflicts which I covered as a correspondent. After all, one war is supposed to be pretty much like another, regardless of whether the rifleman is called doughboy, dogface, or grunt.

Besides, my family is one of those in which each new generation has arrived just in time to take part in another American fight. We have supplied enlisted men for them all: the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the War Between the States (both sides, but mostly Confederate), Spanish American, and World Wars I and II. We almost missed Korea, but finally a step-brother of mine made it. My oldest son, a helicopter pilot, served two tours with distinction in Vietnam, but he flew against family tradition by becoming an officer, so we don't talk much about him.

With all this going for me, you can see why I felt confident—almost brash—about tackling the Park Service assignment. They invited me to visit the historic battle sites they have restored and

manage so proudly and faithfully, and they provided me with voluminous research material, in books and pictures. Two years seemed to me plenty of time in which to turn out such a small volume as this, despite my regular commitment to produce five political cartoons a week. I figured I would burn some midnight oil, drawing upon my own military memories and instincts and skimming the materials lightly just to make sure I got the details right on the flintlocks. I think what I wanted to do was put Willie and Joe under cocked hats.

Now, finally, four years and many gallons of midnight oil later, and in a far humbler frame of mind, I beg leave to present my personal view of the American Revolution and the men who fought it. As I said, I'm not a historian. I'm not an objective sort of journalist, either. Political satire, which is my daily bread, is a highly subjective line of work. What I try to do is study my targets as fairly as I can within my own limits and before forming opinions. Then I present those opinions as vigorously as possible by way of my art—the cartoon.

For example, I'm sure many readers will take exception with what I say about George Washington and Baron von Steuben. Frankly, I was a little surprised, myself, at what my readings on these two gentlemen told me. I decided they were not the sort of commanders I would care to follow to hell and back. Fortunately, my ancestors and a number of others didn't feel as I do, and so we won. Even though I rough up the father of our country in my text, I doubt that my comments will do much to tarnish his reputation.

Just as my travels and studies for this work were unstructured, I do not attempt here to treat the Revolutionary War chronologically nor do I attempt to evaluate tactics or strategy. My outlook on warfare is best illustrated by a cartoon I did some thirty-odd years ago of a soldier in an Italian foxhole reading about the Normandy invasion and observing to his buddy that: "The hell this ain't the most important hole in the world. I'm in it." In that spirit, here is an illustrated essay in which I've had a lot of fun sounding off, rather independently, 202 years after our forefathers declared our independence.

BILL MAULDIN

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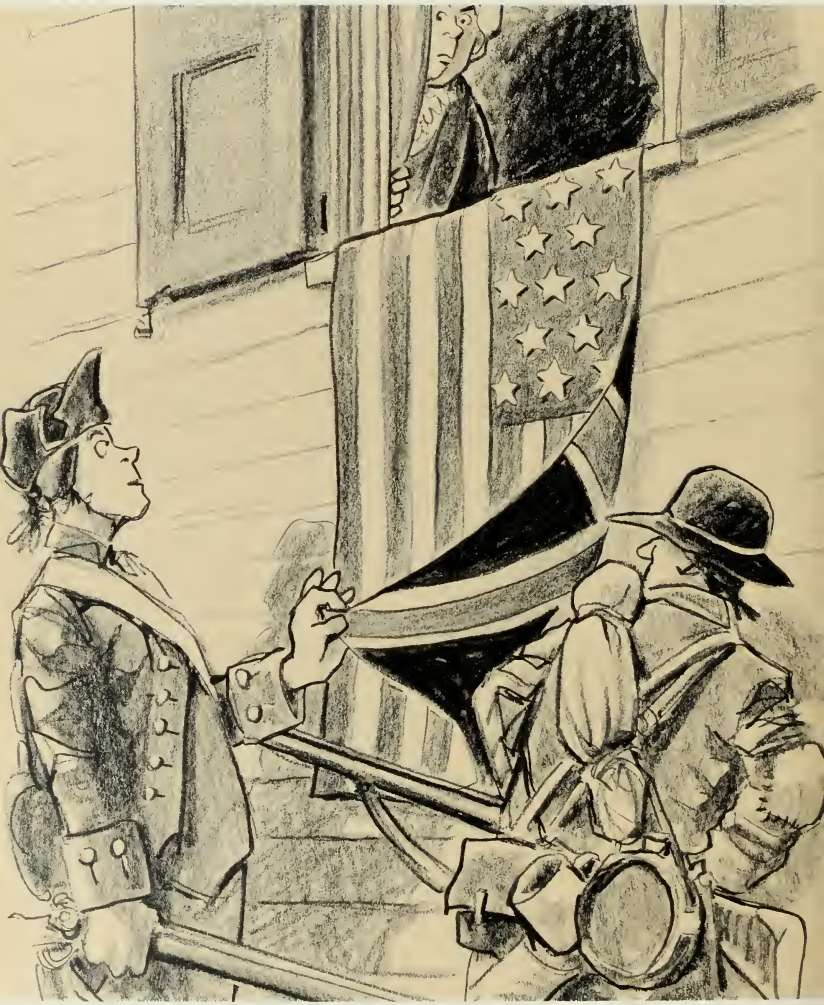


"Interesting lining on your flag here, mister."

Citizens & Soldiers

When the war began at Lexington and Concord in 1775, there was no such thing as an organized American army. Well, one was formed in June 1775, but a third of the way through the war, by the time of the encampment at Morristown in 1777, it was still pretty much a ragtag, amateurish bunch. In fact, almost a year *after* that, the men staggering into winter quarters at Valley Forge were a long way from being crack troops by the military standards of the day.

There was no question about courage. Twice at Bunker Hill our "rabble" showed superb self-discipline and held their fire until they actually saw the whites of the enemy eyes, then retreated only because they ran out of ammunition. But they couldn't salute or march in step worth a hoot. In fact, our military presence was so pathetic that many historians feel the American Revolution might have been more realistically called a rebellion. Perhaps secession is an even better word. After all, a successful revolution changes the mother government. We didn't change Mama a bit—we merely left her.

A more profound difference is that revolutions usually involve downtrodden, exploited masses who are stirred and pushed and pestered by agitators until they get off their duffs and do something about their condition. We had our agitators in Revolutionary times, all right, but our Colonial ancestors didn't really qualify as masses, downtrodden or otherwise.

The average American in those days was about what he is today:

a small property owner who admired independence and occasionally was even known to practice it. Then, as today, he resented being governed and taxed by a bunch of remote and powerful bureaucrats. He grumbled a lot over little tyrannies such as stamp acts and tea taxes—but a *revolution?* The very word causes a shudder to run up the bourgeois spine, and if there ever were, and are, two bourgeois societies, they're England and America.

Most people would rather be moderately comfortable and safe than stand up and fight for an illusive term like "independence." It has been said that if there had been a back door in the Alamo there would be no Texas. Likewise, if the royal administrators who ran the colonies had had an ounce of sense and perception, our hard-nosed radicals, such as Tom Paine, would never have prevailed and there would have been no revolution, or rebellion, or whatever it was. The British were really nuts to have let all this happen. But that's the way things go when bureaucrats feel safe. They become blind and arrogant.

Those were confusing times, however. It's easy today to say, "Why, of course I would have joined up with Washington's army if I'd been there." The word "Tory" conjures up a fat, corrupt, profit-laden Quisling, peeking out through the keyhole of his mansion to count rebel troops so he can dispatch a pigeon to His Majesty's intelligence corps.

Put yourself for a moment into the shoes of an ancestor: a typical, middle-class merchant in Colonial Boston or Charleston. Your little shop supports three employees. Your eldest son, a smart lad, is attending Oxford, even though you can't really afford it. Your house is heavily mortgaged. You're a month behind on your grocery bill, and three months behind at the wholesalers, but you're not really over your head. You're just overextended enough to give yourself insomnia.

Suddenly, through no doing of your own, the Revolution is all around you—just as your wife, who is a bit of a social climber, has got herself on invitation lists of some of the fanciest homes in town, belonging, of course, to His Majesty's faithful administrators.

The uprising involves many of your best friends and favorite relatives. They are probably going to lose their heads, to say nothing of their shirts. The British are old hands at colonialism. They

know how to reward their allies and punish their enemies. You can't play it down the middle for long. Fish or cut bait.

If you had been in this position and your ties to England had been strong, you might have decided, for totally honorable reasons, to stay loyal. More than a few respectable Colonials did so. Many other Tories were simply blind chauvinists. It was always easier to hide behind "My King and country, right or wrong," than to find out what was wrong and work to correct it. This type of Tory probably devised a carriage sticker: "COLONIAL AMERICA—LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT." A third group of "loyalists" consisted of nothing more than opportunists who guessed wrong.

At certain times and places—Philadelphia in the winter of 1777-78, for example—it would have been easy to have guessed wrong. General Howe, a fun-loving Britisher who had whipped the rebels in his last half-dozen battles and was living it up in the upstarts' capital city with his equally fun-loving army, became a real social lion for a while. He was so popular with so many fancy local folk that Coffin and Anderson, one of Philadelphia's dealers in fine silks and brocades, sold 12,000 pounds sterling worth of dress materials to ladies attending Howe's farewell ball when he left town.

Chances are, however, that our hypothetical citizen would have gone along with the gang and joined the Revolution. Not, however, as one of those raggedy, raffish fellows one normally associates with this sort of activity. George Washington himself had little use for the unruly or uncouth, even as he accepted the responsibility of leading them. In one of his 1775 letters home, shortly after he took command of the American forces, he referred to the Massachusetts militia as "an exceeding dirty and nasty people." In another message, a week later, he said,

"As we have now nearly completed our Lines of Defence, we have nothing more, in my opinion, to fear from the Enemy, provided we can keep our men to their duty and make them watchful and vigilant; but it is among the most difficult tasks I ever undertook in my life to induce these people to believe that there is, or can be, danger till the Bayonet is pushed at their Breasts; not that it proceeds from any uncommon prowess, but rather from an unaccountable kind of stupidity in the lower class of these people

which, believe me, prevails but too generally among the officers of the Massachusetts part of the Army who are nearly of the same kidney with the Privates, and adds not a little to my difficulties; as there is no such thing as getting of officers of this stamp to exert themselves in carrying orders into execution—to curry favor with the men (by whom they were chosen, and on whose smiles possibly they may think they may again rely) seems to be one of the principal objects of their attention. . . ."

Poor George. Down where he came from on the old plantation, a gentleman didn't try to ingratiate himself with the field hands. And if this wasn't going to be a gentleman's revolution, what was the point of it all? I must say, however, that I do agree with him on the folly of troops electing their own officers. I can imagine a lieutenant sending a man on a dangerous mission, with the man saying, "All right, sir, I'll go, but you've lost *my* vote."

Also, it's only fair to point out that Washington must have seen some good in the rabble, otherwise he wouldn't have consented to lead them. And by the Battle of Saratoga, something must have started working right. Our fledgling army, with militia consisting of musket-bearing New England farmers, whipped General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne and frustrated his grand plan to drive south from Canada, split off New England, end the whole unpleasant affair, and get those rubes back to the plow.

General Washington had a lot of physical problems. He suffered from rheumatism and nasty attacks of dysentery. One of the things which probably curdled his innards the most, and might have contributed to his recurring toothaches, was the endless problem of how to keep recruits after they came into the army. Obviously, they all supported the cause, but they were unable to see why they couldn't go home to look after their families and property when they weren't actually fighting. After all, to an inexperienced soldier one battle seemed like a whole war. When that particular engagement was over, many of those who were refused permission to go home simply went over the hill.

Some disappeared legally. In the beginning, men were actually allowed to enlist for short, definite periods—often as little as a few weeks or months. The militia was called up until "December 10th,"

or "Christmas Day," or some other arbitrary date, not "for the duration," as is done by more experienced nations at war. It was felt by many tender-hearted souls in our new government that the only way troops could be enticed to leave home and endure the rigors of combat with smiles on their faces was to promise them they could return home again soon.

For much of the war, Washington had to watch his army melt away at inopportune moments. An infantryman whose enlistment was up at a certain hour on a certain day could literally drop his gear and walk out of a battle. Whole units sometimes did this.

"This is no place for a man with rheumatism."

"We must try to think of them as fellow-revolutionaries."

Imagine the problems of a field commander about to mount an attack and having to take into consideration which elements would go how far on their current enlistments.

Before eventually deciding upon a standard three-year enlistment period for everybody, our Revolutionary leaders tried many forms of cajolery to stop the ranks from melting away. They even adopted the tactic of paying the men a reasonable wage. That was a radical departure from tradition in those times, and it deserved to work. Unfortunately, the "Continental," the printed dollar of the new government, depreciated faster than it could be printed. A soldier with a pocketful of them was no better off than before.

The money wasn't even very well printed. Presses would run out of ink in the middle of production and many Continentals would be just blank paper. Wags of the day cracked that since everything but money was going up in value, the blank bills would soon be worth more than the printed ones. Not many people laughed, especially soldiers.

While Washington's army starved and froze at Valley Forge, nearby farmers and merchants sold mostly to the British—not because of any particular political leanings but simply because they were businessmen and the pound sterling was solid currency. All the necessities of clothing, blankets, shoes, tools, horse fodder, and even gunpowder became hard for the Revolutionary forces to purchase, simply because their money was considered worthless. The upshot to all this is probably that if you plan to start a revolution in our society you should begin with a handful of credit cards and a sound credit rating.

As I've thought about this book, and traveled some of the paths worn by our ancestors 200 years ago, I've wondered a lot about what made Washington's men tick. As we know now, they had much to lose and little to gain by taking the side they did. They didn't even have the comfort of being carried on a popular wave of emotion. According to some historians, as many as two-thirds of the American people resisted the idea of resisting the King. Most upheavals around the world are for people to gain what the average Colonial American already had: a little piece of property he could call his own. Why, then, did Americans join the cause?

I think the answer may be simple cussedness. We inherited a

"Well, no one can accuse us of being mercenaries."

streak of eccentricity from the British, who positively revere the trait. In every war the American soldier has fought, he has distinguished himself only in adversity. Even when he is well-trained, adequately paid, and superbly fed, the first time he meets the enemy he finds it shockingly unreal that anybody would try to actually hurt *him*.

Finally, it occurs to him that it will hurt as much to get shot in the tail as in the buttons. At the edge of the beachhead or the bottom of the swamp, with his pack lost and his belly growling, with the Post Exchange a dim memory, with the colonel behind a rock and with the enemy all around, the same sense of personal outrage that first struck him now comes to his rescue.

"Dammit," he says, "this can't be happening to *me*."

And he makes it unhappen. You can't really prevail against that sort of indignation, and the British, of all people, should have known it. Maybe they did know, come to think of it. Maybe that's why they hired the Hessians to help them.

"I'm a disgrace to what uniform, sir?"

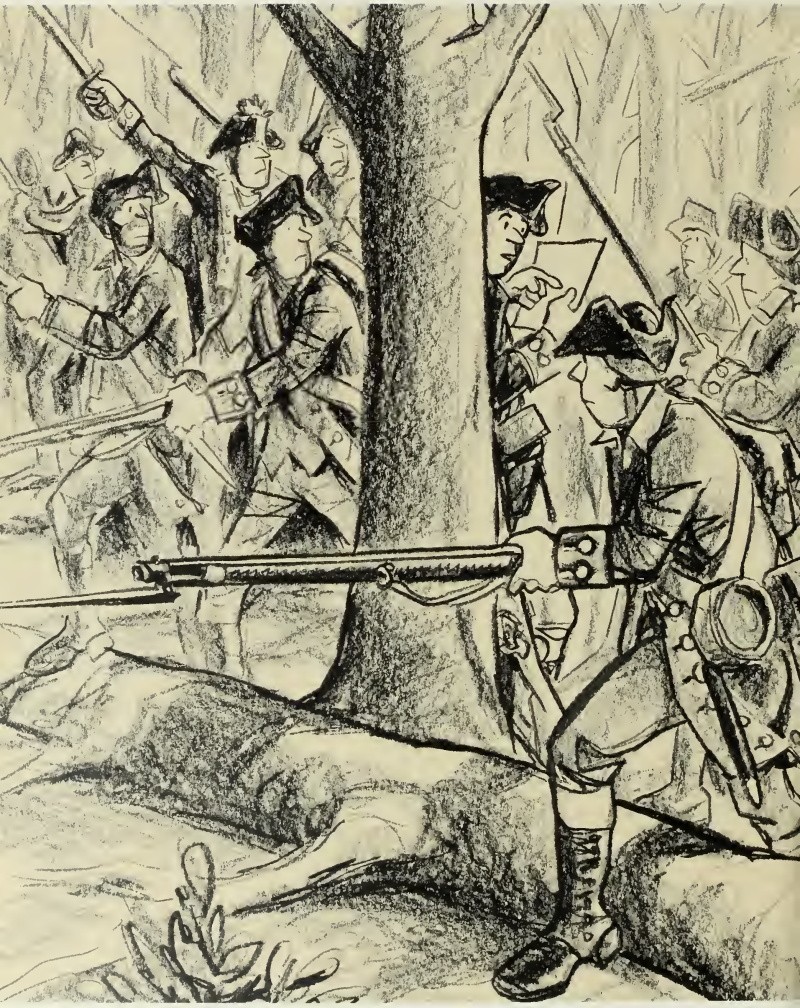
Rabble with Rifles

War in the 18th century, particularly in "civilized" portions of the world, such as Europe, was fought by peasant-conscripts, who were officered by the educated upper crust. Civilian life was rigidly structured: you were born into a class and you bloody well stayed there. And it was simple, convenient, and sometimes even efficient to carry this caste structure into battle. Soldiers were expected to be lunkheads, and any man or child so regarded usually manages to fulfill the image.

Officers, on the other hand, were supposed to be born gentlemen and natural leaders. It just sort of came with your mother's milk, even if she hired a wet-nurse so she could keep her figure fashionable. You could be retarded, palsied, club-footed, blind in one eye and myopic in the other, alcoholic, and addicted to roasting cats alive, but if you came from the right side of the carriage tracks you got a commission when your nation went to war, though it might cost you a little money.

The stalwarts in your command were obedient, too, even when you sent them over cliffs into rivers in full regalia because you couldn't read a map. They knew it was usually less painful to die in battle on the orders of an idiot than to be broken on the wheel for questioning him. A common soldier prayed for good leaders, but it seldom, if ever, occurred to him to try to become one himself.

As I said, this system was sometimes efficient in those days. The term "cannon-fodder" meant just that. A soldier was expected to commit suicide in cadence, without a flinch, whether advancing



"Would you believe it? My enlistment just ran out."

into grapeshot or hurling himself upon bayonets. To bring him to a state of mindlessness where he was ready to do this, he was drilled physically and bullied mentally and spiritually until he was not only convinced that he was the lowliest scum on earth (remember, he had been taught this from childhood) but that his only hope of salvation, his only ticket through the Pearly Gates, was to climax a lifetime of servility by an act of self-sacrifice.

What justified all this, as much as anything in war is justified, was the primitive nature of the weapons used up to and throughout the 18th century. Fists, clubs, spears, slingshots, arrows, muskets that couldn't hit a bull in the rump at 50 paces, cast-iron cannon that were as dangerous at the breech as the muzzle, and bayonets—all this stuff put you eyeball to eyeball with your opponent. Men who would stand firm were a general's only asset. Those with enough imagination to get scared would not only be useless as individuals, but their common sense might prove contagious and panic the whole kaboodle.

It's ironic that the American army was created right at the end of what might be called the long era of the pointed stick, just when military technology was about to become sophisticated. The forerunner of the new weaponry that would enable an individual soldier to use his smarts and strike from afar was the long rifle.

We Americans have always revered our legendary frontier riflemen: those razor-eyed stalwarts who could draw a bead on a treed squirrel at a hundred paces and "bark" him, hitting the wood a fraction of an inch below his feet, so that he flew into the air dead of shock, intact but already tenderized for the pot.

A lot of our well-known national preoccupation with firearms goes straight back to those "Pennsylvania" and "Kentucky" rifles, which in turn go back to early 18th-century German and Swiss craftsmen who developed the rifle as a hunting weapon and brought it here, along with their other talents, as immigrants.

Rifling, of course, was the process of machining spiral grooves in the weapon's barrel, leaving raised "lands" between the grooves that squeezed the soft bullet as it moved along and imparted a spin to it. This seemingly simple process could get very sophisticated: for example, some craftsmen actually put in a "gain twist," whereby the bullet started spinning more slowly at the beginning

of its travel, when inertia was greatest. This allowed it to start more easily, giving the powder a better chance to kick it cleanly on its way. Perhaps the best way for a non-shooter to visualize what all this did for a bullet's accuracy is to imagine a forward pass in football where the ball is merely thrown without a spin: it tumbles as it does when kicked.

Another factor which had a lot to do with the superior accuracy of the American rifle over the British musket was the rifleman's use of greasy cloth or thin leather patches wrapped around the bullet before it was seated. This accomplished many things: it made the projectile go down on top of its powder charge more easily (musket balls were usually simply dropped in or pounded home with the ramrod, which deformed them), it created a seal to prevent explosive gases from escaping and being wasted around the ball instead of behind it, and it provided a protective film against moisture in case the weapon wasn't fired for a period after loading.

All of this explains why a good man with a good rifle could hit an enemy in the head at 200 or 300 yards—no mean feat even today. On the other hand, a non-rifled, smooth-bore musket, the world's standard military arm at the time of the American Revolution, couldn't be depended upon to hit a human-sized target at more than 80 to 100 yards even in the hands of an expert. This is why standard strategy was to line up a bunch of soldiers, attach bayonets to their muskets, and have them fire by volley. The sheer volume of flying lead was bound to cut down some of the attackers.

The survivors, and there were usually plenty, would keep coming, and another rank of musketeers would step up and blast away, while their predecessors reloaded. When the enemy arrived, it was time to jab ferociously with the bayonet. Basically, you could say the infantryman of the day carried a spear that belched a lot of spectacular fire and then became a spear again. The real trick of this sort of warfare was to hold your men's fire—whether you were attacking or defending a line—until the other side's nerve broke and they blasted away, whereupon you let them have it at close range before they could reload and you could be more effective.

As schoolchildren, most of us swallowed the notion that the Redcoats were an army of stuffy Britishers and plodding German mercenaries marching in rigid ranks and being decimated by our

"No wonder you need bayonets on these things."

deadly-eyed, moccasined, tobacco-chomping lads sniping from behind the shrubbery with their lovely rifles. In other words, we learned from our books that it was the enemy who fired by volley like robots, while all the imagination was on our side. There is some substance to this. Burgoyne himself, speaking of the New Englanders he faced before Saratoga, said:

"The enemy had with their army great numbers of marksmen, armed with rifle-barrel pieces: these, during an engagement, hovered upon the flanks in small detachments, and were very expert in securing themselves, and in shifting their ground. In this action [Sept. 19, 1777] many placed themselves in high trees in the rear of their own line, and there was seldom a minute's interval of smoke in any part of our line without officers being taken off by single shot."

More support for the legend came from a British colonel named George Hanger, who was standing with another colonel named Tarleton, who commanded the British Legion, when an American rifleman fired at them from 400 yards away, killing a horse belonging to a nearby orderly. At first it might not seem much of a feat to aim at two colonels and put down a horse, but it says a lot about the range and power of the weapon.

Many such reports found their way back to England. At Great Bridge, Virginia, in 1775, American snipers killed 62 enemy and lost none themselves. At Moore's Creek Bridge, North Carolina, in 1776, our riflemen killed 70 Redcoats and suffered two casualties, one of whom later died. British Gen. William Howe made a point of sending home such stories in hopes of getting more troops, but the actual result, of course, was that recruiting fell off.

The truth is that the American marksman wasn't all that invincible all the time. At Wetzell's Mill, North Carolina, in 1781, 25 veteran riflemen who had fought at the battle of Kings Mountain all took a crack at close range at a mounted British colonel named James Webster and couldn't even hit his horse, although most of them were so sharp they were able to reload and miss again. Maybe they had been nipping at the jug.

Even more surprising to me was the discovery that among the Hessians opposing us were quite a few riflemen fighting both as

Sharpshooters without bayonets were in trouble when they missed.

individuals and small units. The German word for huntsman is Jaeger. Two Jaeger companies joined the British forces in 1776 and were so good that more were sent, eventually comprising a small corps. They didn't fight as a corps, however. Small detachments were loaned out to regular units as sort of freelance scouts, sentries, and snipers. To have a military asset such as that and to make full and proper use of it seems to me a mark of good leadership.

From what I have been able to learn, our woods were full of riflemen, but we failed to really exploit them. What the heck, one is tempted to ask: we won, didn't we? Sure, but we would have

"Barbaric!"

probably won somewhat faster had we used our resources better. Oh, we had our Jaeger units. Col. Daniel Morgan's "rifle corps" authorized by Washington himself in the summer of 1777, became famous at Saratoga, then was broken up after that victory and scattered back into the main army. And several other short-lived attempts were made to form such outfits. Thus, it would be incorrect to say that we ignored our squirrel-barkers totally, but our schoolboy image of who fought our Revolution is somewhat tinted.

Part of the trouble, of course, lay in the very idea of trying to make large military units out of these fellows. A woodsman, by nature, is self-reliant and independent. Even the Germans had the good sense to call their Jaegers a "corps" for administrative purposes only and used the men in ways for which they were best suited. Our leaders were simply pre-occupied most of the time with conventional European tactics and strategy.

In fairness, they weren't always wrong in this. Our men weren't *all* frustrated frontiersmen. According to George M. Horn in the 1977 edition of *The Shooter's Bible,* only one American bullet in 300 found its mark at Lexington and Concord, and only one man out of 15 hit anybody. If true, that's pretty lousy shooting, even given the fact that most of them had muskets, and indicates that they were city slickers, by and large. If a man doesn't know how to fight as an individual, he must be trained to fight as part of a unit. I'm not anti-discipline: I simply hate to see talent wasted by unimaginative people.

Incidentally, another reason often given for relieving the American sharpshooter of his own piece, issuing him a smoothbore musket and bayonet, and teaching him to stand for three hours at parade rest was that it took him so long to reload his rifle properly. In a combat situation, the theory goes, our man fired, making a flash and great cloud of smoke from his hiding place, thereby exposing his position. Then, while he fiddled with his buckskin patches and ramrod, an enemy soldier had plenty of time to run up and skewer him—and the American was defenseless, of course, because his fancy weapon wouldn't hold a bayonet. Presumably, whoever did all this theorizing never heard of hit-and-run tactics, including reloading on the run. But then, running away isn't very regular or military, is it? One of our generals, Edward Stevens, com-

manding the Virginia militia at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina in 1781, was highly commended by historians for the fact that his men held firm under heavy attack while other militia took to its heels. His strategy was simple, effective, and well-proven from the old battlefields of Europe. Eight months earlier, he had watched his Virginians take off under attack at Camden, South Carolina. This time, he posted a line of sentinels at his brigade's rear, with orders to shoot anybody who didn't stand fast. (It would be interesting to learn whether he used musketmen or riflemen for this.)

Personally, I think a lot of the reason our army did not exactly encourage individualism among its fighting men lay with George Washington, who set precedents followed by our military to this day. The result is that through all ranks we have always had two types of soldier: those who look good on the parade ground, and those who look good in a fight. In my own military experience I have known personally of numerous cases where a unit unofficially had two sets of non-commissioned officers. One set wore the chevrons, enjoyed the privileges, collected the pay, and took charge in the rear, inspecting shoeshines, punishing infractions, and teaching close-order drill. When the unit was ordered back to the front, the oddball set was sprung from the guardhouse and took charge in battle. This picture is not as exaggerated as it sounds.

Higher up the rank scale, I have known two kinds of American generals. While I may not be qualified as a serious critic of the art of warfare, or its leading performers, I'm aware that some of the most pompous martinets have won some of the biggest battles. I am simply allergic to martinets, that's all, and it has always seemed to me that the most important part of leadership in any endeavor involving large numbers of people is the ability to relate to those people. After all, how many opportunities does a general have to be really brilliant, as on a chessboard? All but about one percent of warfare is a set-piece: a matter of slogging along and hoping the other guy outfumbles you. The commander whose troops are surly, miserable, and distrustful is at a disadvantage, fumblewise.

Among the most famous generals in American history, we find spit-and-polish types such as Douglas A. MacArthur, who loved pomp and parades, and George S. Patton, who in speech and man-

"Why, I could have stayed home and done this."

ner exhibited some of the characteristics of a spoiled brat. We also find many down-to-earth, unassuming Omar N. Bradleys, and quiet, thoughtful, statesmanlike George C. Marshalls. Some have been mixtures: Ulysses S. Grant, who hurled divisions about the battlefield like Patton (but not whooping with joy like Patton), and who, like Bradley, was nice to his orderlies and kept forgetting where he put his hat.

Possibly the best combination of all good qualities was found in Robert E. Lee, who managed all at once to be impressive, lordly, fatherly, inspiring, gentle, tough, and brilliant. In other words, he knew when to be what. An orderly polished his boots and sword not in meniality, but because he knew Lee had more important things to do with his time. Somehow Lee conveyed to his men that he was thinking about them, not merely moving them about the board. I suspect a sense of theater is one of the best qualities for this line of work. Patton thought of himself as theatrical, but I think he was mostly a showman.

As for Washington, I find myself comparing him in many ways to Douglas MacArthur. Both loved their creature comforts. MacArthur was famous for flying in refrigerators for his command posts and Washington had a special, folding, four-poster bed hauled around for him. Poor old George suffered many ailments, so perhaps I judge him too harshly for this. Anyway, both were austere and anti-egalitarian, and both managed to win their wars. It's their style that interests me.

Why did Washington opt for drafting riflemen into the regular ranks and issuing them smoothbores and bayonets? I think the very idea of some laconic, rude, unwashed good ol' boy with a red neck and a long rifle he loved more than his woman (he slept with it more, too, to keep the "furniture," as the lockwork was called, dry) cluttering the ranks was enough to shock any proper officer right down to his patent-leather pumps. Early in the war, Joseph Reed, Washington's military secretary, wrote to his wife:

"To attempt to introduce discipline and subordination into a new army must always be a work of much difficulty, but where the principles of democracy so universally prevail, where so great an equality and so thorough a levelling spirit predominates, either no discipline can be established, or he who attempts it must become

". . . Und ven I yell 'achtung!' I vant to hear dose rags click."

odious and detestable, a position which no one will choose . . . You may form some notion of it when I tell you that yesterday morning a captain of horse, who attends the general from Connecticut, was seen shaving one of his men on the parade near the house."

Now, what in thunderation was wrong with a captain shaving a soldier? Maybe the captain was a barber in civilian life, and was showing his men how to stay neat. Maybe he just needed the practice. If Christ could bathe the feet of a beggar, couldn't a captain in the American Revolution shave a private? Our new society was a departure from rigid European traditions, with every individual at least able to *hope* for a chance to prove his own worth. I think it's too bad that the army which fought to create this society wasn't different, too. It could have been, at least in some important ways.

Probably the man most to blame for instilling the Prussian spirit which permeates our military to this day was a minor baron from Magdeburg named Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, in 1777 an unemployed soldier of fortune. He called himself a general, his rank was captain, and his forte was drilling soldiers.

Professional mercenary fighting men were the chief Teutonic export in those days, as the British well knew, having hired tens of thousands of Hessians to keep the American colonists in line. Friedrich, the drillmaster, lucked out when he found a couple of prominent rebel sponsors, Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin, who presented him to George Washington as a baron and a lieutenant general from the Prussian king's own personal staff.

Popular legend gives us a picture of von Steuben arriving at Valley Forge, where he was appalled by the sight of a ragged, disorganized, freezing, starving gang of revolutionaries. This is always good theater: the newcomer is a martinet, snarling and snapping and sneaking up on the slobs for their own good until, lo! The mob is transformed into a crisp military machine. The last time I saw it was in a movie called "Patton."

Friedrich even wrote a book of regulations which became the Bible of Washington's army. Once you accept the notion that his was the only way to fight a war, many of the regulations make sense. Pages of detailed instructions tell how to maneuver a battalion through an obstruction without messing up the unit's geometry:

ARTICLE 4

Passage of a Defile in Front, by Platoons.

A battalion marching and meeting with a bridge or defile, over or through which not more than the front of a division can pass at a time, the commanding officer orders

Halt!

and then to the two platoons before whom the defile presents itself

March!

on which they pass the defile in one division. As soon as those two platoons have marched, the commanding officer orders

To the Right and Left,—Face!

The platoons on the right face to the left, and those on the left face to the right.

March!

They march till they join, fronting the defile; when the commanding officer of the two platoons commands

Halt! Front! March!

and they pass the defile; the rest following in the same manner.

Von Steuben did not believe in leaving much to the imagination. If any of our wild-eyed revolutionaries wanted water:

". . . they must apply to the officer of the police, who will order the drum to beat the necessary signal; on which all who want water must immediately parade with their canteens before the colours, where the officer of the police will form and send them off under the care of two non-commissioned officers of the police, who are to be answerable that they bring back the whole detachment, and that no excesses are committed whilst they are out. Wood and other necessities must be fetched in the same manner."

After a little of this, the prudent soldier, feeling a pang of thirst, would probably sigh, scoop up a mouthful of snow, and go back to molding musket balls, which could have been the crafty Prussian's strategy all the time.

"Before you arrest him for sleeping on duty, ask him how he does it."

Mud & Guts

Military technology has advanced mightily over the years, yet I doubt that it's any more painful or terminal to be zapped by a strafing jet than by a flying boulder from a catapult. Is it worse to be punched out by a shell fragment than by a crossbow quarrel, an arrow-like projectile with a four-sided head?

The fact is that military weapons have always been intended to hurt, cripple, demoralize, and kill. Despite their unpleasantness, they have remained a major preoccupation of man through the ages. More creative effort has gone into the invention, development, and sophistication of people-destroying devices than any other human enterprise. And so today we have "smart bombs," costing millions to launch, which achieve approximately the same result as a sharp stick in the eye.

Mud, meanwhile, remains the same, in appearance and composition as well as effect. While ordnance computers plot ballistic curves, rain falls in straight or slanting lines, depending upon the wind, and turns dirt into something which, when churned and blended by hundreds of wheels and thousands of feet, becomes what I call Military Mud.

Study the meteorological data of any campaign in history, including the American Revolution, and you will find record rains, followed by bottomless mud. Every army likes to think it has divine support. We have songs such as "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition," and the Germans stamp "GOTT MIT UNS" into

their metal belt buckles, but it should be obvious to anyone who cares to check it out that the Forces of Heaven are offended by the forces of man, and show their displeasure by the simple and effective curse of Military Mud, which is nearly always to be found with troops in the field.

In summer, as the infantryman sucks one boot out, hoping his foot stays in it, replants it, and starts sucking the other one out, he finds himself wishing for winter, so the stuff would harden. Winter does indeed come, bringing the added discomforts of chill, but does the mud freeze into a reasonably stable mass? Not while you and your friends keep treading and stirring it. How can it? Winter mud only hardens as you sleep in it. The veteran Valley Forge bivouacker, snoring in a snowbank, sinking slowly through the fragile, melting flakes, knew full well he would awaken gripped in the clammy, frigid embrace of Mother Goo herself.

An interesting winter phenomenon known instinctively to sled dogs, and quickly learned by infantrymen, is that snow, unlike mud, can be warm—relatively speaking. Not only is it good insulation, especially in new-fallen, fluffy form, against the wind, but the temperature beneath its surface is higher than that of the air above. You can count on this. Any time it's not true, the snow starts melting.

You can always tell a novice at sleeping in the snow from a veteran of some experience such as Valley Forge or Morristown by noting where he puts most of his blanket—if he's lucky enough to own one—or his coat, or whatever he uses for cover. If he puts it over himself, he's green, . . . and he'll soon be blue. The proper place to put most of it is underneath, to slow his body heat from melting the snow and frozen mud below. The enemy is wetness, not pure cold. Dampness will seep into the very marrow of his bones, there to refreeze, and he'll be dug out with a pickaxe come spring.

Besides, chances are that more snow during the night will provide a fresh top blanket. If not, he can always scoop some over himself. Of course, his body eventually will melt what's below, but you can take comfort in the knowledge that infantrymen are seldom allowed to lie in one place that long.

Rain, too, created special problems for the Continental. First, his flintlock was extremely vulnerable to weather. When the trigger

"Rabble rousers!"

A full cooking pot.

was pulled, the flint sprang forward against steel and drove sparks into a panful of powder, which sent a flash of fire through a pinhole into the chamber where the charge awaited. All of this machinery was exposed. The slightest wetness of any part rendered the whole inoperable.

If our Revolutionary stalwart was lucky enough to be issued a coat, he usually discovered that it couldn't fully cover both firearm and person, and so he had constantly to make choices between the welfare of one or the other. Headed for battle? Probably better to arrive with a scratchy throat, a dripping nose, and a dry piece. But how well could he fight with flu? How well could he aim with chills and fever? Of course, it did not matter much with the average flintlock!

Returning from the front, maybe he could risk a little dampness in the flashpan—but what if he was ambushed? Well, maybe that was why General Washington made everybody carry a bayonet. The savvy coat-owner usually worked out a compromise, trading off a wet buttstock for a dry hip, allowing a slight, icy trickle down the neck in exchange for the comforting surety of a pouchful of crisp paper cartridges.

In a really driving rain, the best method was to sling the musket over the shoulder muzzle-down, so that no stray droplets could run down the inside of the barrel, and throw the coat over stock, lockwork, and shoulders. This pretty well guaranteed the functioning of firepower when needed and gave the enemy the impression that he was being approached by an army of colossal hunchbacks.

In my studies, I've been unable to find the Revolutionary term for trenchfoot, as it came to be known during the World Wars of this century, but of all physical inconveniences suffered by our worthy ancestors in our first national war, this must surely have been one of the worst.

Trenchfoot is the result, simply, of chronically wet, cold feet. It starts out as the kind of harmless discomfort you feel after walking through slush without galoshes. Back home you can usually warm your feet and put on dry socks soon afterward. But you can't do that if you are a soldier in a mudhole, with no fresh clothing, no chance to build a fire, and you are even unable to restore some circulation by moving and stamping about, for fear of getting a

"Et tu, brute?"

musketball out of the nearby bushes. What happens then is that your feet literally begin to rot. If it goes on for a few days, which it often does, gangrene is the result.

Trenchfoot is a deadly serious matter to commanders of troops in static winter situations. It decimated American units in France in 1917-18 and Italy in 1943-44, until it came to be recognized as a major military threat. In Korea, one division commander was known to make surprise foot-inspections among his frontline troops. If he discovered a single case of trenchfoot, or even a soldier with wet extremities, every non-commissioned officer above the man was broken in rank, and every officer received an official reprimand. This led to sergeants and lieutenants stuffing the pockets of their parkas with dry socks and prowling about with a consuming interest in what went on between the toes of their subordinates.

The obvious magnitude of this problem among Revolutionary troops boggles the mind. Records do show us that there was plenty of rain at Valley Forge and Morristown and some at several other locations, particularly in the Southern campaign. Trenchfoot must have been so universal an affliction that nobody even thought to mention or write about it. Ironically, what probably saved a lot of our distinguished forefathers from having to march to victory on their shinbones was the fact that they lacked proper footgear in the first place and were often forced to wrap rags around their feet. This allowed a certain amount of air circulation and, because cloth doesn't last long when walked upon, necessitated frequent changes.

No text on soldierly discomforts would be complete without mention of the cootie, or body louse. This little devil was the bane of military life right up to World War II, when DDT came along. Now that there is a serious question whether the insect or the chemical is the greater menace, it's possible that the cootie might stage a comeback.

It is certain that during our revolt against George III the cootie became king. Soldiers who looked after their clothing and bathed regularly controlled the pests to a degree, but personal hygiene was difficult under the best of circumstances. Soap was a rare luxury, and even the cleanest rifleman had on him two or three especially tough lice, resistant to most vigorous scratching or dousing by poisonous substances—even colonial whisky.

If the infantry was Queen of Battle, the cootie was King.

Sometimes, when a man got used to the idea that he was stuck with his personal menagerie, a certain camaraderie would develop with one or two of his more interesting specimens.

If a foot soldier noticed while attacking a particularly obnoxious gang of lice on his anatomy that one was consistently quicker than the others in scuttling to safety, he would enter the sprinter in races against other men's cooties. A track would be a scrap of cloth or paper, or an owner's arm if one of the contestants was loath to leave the host body. Motivation to race would be provided by a smoldering twig.

The winner would be plucked to safety and put gently to bed in some comfortable container such as a snuffbox, to rest up for another run. If the loser was a close second, he, too, would be saved; otherwise he would be burned with the paper or cloth track and the owner would start searching his person for another thoroughbred. This rather brutal sport often drew large crowds and inspired huge bets, to be rivaled only in later years by shipboard crap games.

There are two sides to every coin. True, the cootie is something we can do without. Yet many lonely, frightened, miserable men huddled interminably in winter bivouac found diversion, companionship, and, to a degree, even saved their sanity by turning their pests into pets.

"I promised my mother I wouldn't drink."

Biting the Bullet

American military medicine hasn't changed as much as we might like to think since our Revolutionary army used houses, barns, and even churches as field hospitals at such places as Morristown, Valley Forge, Yorktown, and Williamsburg. Oh, there have been *technical* advances: helicopters instead of wagons for ambulances, antibiotics, and so forth. But it's interesting to note statistics from National Park Service historians that show a Revolutionary soldier had a 98 percent chance of coming out of the average battle alive and had a 75 percent chance of coming out of an army hospital alive. As far as I know, those figures would be about the same in modern times.

Food available to the Revolutionary soldier often tended to have adverse effects upon its consumers, as does military chow today. I've already mentioned that George Washington himself had many ailments. One of the worst was dysentery, or "bloody flux" as it was called. He is supposed to have suffered it more in the French and Indian Wars than during the Revolution, but the point is that he suffered it in the service. Most diarrhea among troops was brought on by flu or by bolting raw anything that looked remotely like nourishment during a march. An occasional lucky victim of this affliction was able to find a surgeon with an over-supply of opiates: that is, more than enough for the doc's own personal needs. Otherwise, the illness had to run its course.

For purgatives, medics in those days had a wide choice: jalap, ipecac, rhubarb salts, and large musket balls. In more recent times,

army physicians streamlined all this nonsense into one specific for most intestinal disorders. Called the "CC pill" in World War II, it was somewhat smaller and less succulent than a musket ball. Its effectiveness was directly related to the patient's confidence in the talents of the dispenser. The other post-Revolutionary medical discovery—aside from antibiotics, of course—is aspirin. There have been few soldierly ailments that couldn't be cured by inspired combinations of CC pills and aspirin: so few that many army doctors have limited their practice to the prescription of these miracle drugs, preferring to call in specialists for truly complicated cases.

What Revolutionary army medicine lacked in modern technology was sometimes made up for by bedside manners. Even stiff-necked Baron von Steuben, in Chapter XXIV of his Regulations, noted:

"There is nothing which gains an officer the love of his soldiers more than his care of them under the distress of sickness; it is then he has the power of exerting his humanity in providing them every comfortable necessary, and making their situation as agreeable as possible."

As with other von Steuben pronouncements, it is not hard to imagine an ulterior motive. After drilling men barefoot in the snow, an officer could win back their devotion by tenderly massaging out the frostbite.

Epidemiology was not unknown in Revolutionary times. For example, the accepted method of immunizing soldiers against smallpox was to throw a bunch of healthy men into a barn or house with a few infected ones. In time, the building's occupants fell into three categories: those who became sick with smallpox and recovered with varying degrees of disfigurement, those who had some sort of natural immunity, and those who died of the disease. The first two groups were told they had been "inoculated." It could be argued, I suppose, that the same results would have been achieved by simply letting everybody catch or miss smallpox on his own, but that would have been neither scientific nor military.

Surgery was really awful in those days. Bleeding was widely done as a cure-all. Today this is usually called exploratory surgery. Some practitioners, confronted by a puzzling case, were actually known to hack away at healthy tissue until none was left. When the patient died the doctor would cite an emaciated condition as the cause. This

sort of thing persisted from the Revolution to the advent of malpractice suits.

Human anatomy was probably better known in those days by the average artist than by his physician. Both professions indulged in the illegal procurement and dissection of cadavers for study, but because of a quirk in human nature, people were more tolerant of painters doing it. Today, thanks to a more enlightened public and closed-circuit television in hospitals, many army doctors know at least as much about the human body as do most artists.

Not that it would have done the surgical profession much good to tell a liver from a spleen. A man hit in a limb had an outside chance of continuing life as a cripple if he could conceal his problem from his unit's medical personnel and keep the hemorrhaging stanched with poultices of mud and cobwebs until the wound more or less scabbed over.

While it is probably safe to assume that a wounded officer was more likely to get prompt service than a soldier, you can see how this could have been a drawback sometimes in those days. During the siege of Fort Stanwix in upstate New York, in August of 1777, Gen. Nicholas Herkimer was shot in the leg. There is no way for a limping general to avoid medical attention. The story goes that poor Herkimer asked the surgeon if he'd ever done an amputation before.

"No, I haven't," the doctor reportedly said.

"Well," sighed the general, "we've all got to start somewhere." He died shortly after the operation.

A girl from Plympton, Massachusetts, named Deborah Sampson became an expert at avoiding Revolutionary war medics. She enlisted as an infantryman in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment of Militia under the name of Robert Shurtleff and got along fine until she was severely wounded in the head by a saber-wielding Tory during a fight at Tarrytown, New York, while her unit was marching to West Point. Preferring the disfigurement of a scar to the attention of a corpsman, she fought on with her now-admiring comrades, who were beginning to consider her quite a fellow in spite of her hairless face. Her captain, George Webb, definitely accepted her as one of the boys.

Then poor Deborah got hit again—this time in the thigh by a Tory bushwhacker's musket ball. Once again she managed to

"Wait your turn, soldier!"

duck the doctors—the thigh wound would have exposed her for sure—thereby preserving her masquerade and probably her own life as well. She treated the injury herself until it mended. She served at Ft. Ticonderoga, and eventually ended up as an orderly for a General Patterson in Philadelphia. There she came down with some epidemic bug of the day—possibly typhus—and for the third time found herself a fugitive from medical aid. This time she became helplessly feverish and was discovered and saved by a civilian doctor who actually tried to protect her secret. Eventually, however, everybody learned about her and George Washington gave her an honorable discharge. There is a moral in here somewhere if you can find it.

Only rare Revolutionary War casualties survived a hit in the torso. Victims of chest wounds usually faded out mercifully fast. Gut-shot cases went on . . . and agonizingly on. There was nothing the good doctor could do. If he opened the sufferer up with his rusty kit of tools, which even the carpenters of the day would have scorned, he simply created new infections.

This, of course, was the main problem. We are all familiar, from movies and books, with the gory dramatics of battlefield surgery in the old days: five or six men hold down the struggling, screaming victim; at the worst moments the doctor gives the victim a lead bullet to clench between his teeth and, if the sufferer is lucky, a slug of rum or whisky to somewhat dull his senses.

What the movies seldom showed was what happened to the patients who managed to survive post-operative shock and loss of blood. After all, infection is not very dramatic. But they all got it: gangrene, peritonitis, tetanus, or combinations of the three. Tetanus thrives in soil rich with horse manure. Every 18th-century foot soldier's skin and clothing were crawling with the stuff. All it took was a bullet or bayonet to carry it in. Many a superb physical specimen who had survived getting hit and gotten over the hurdles of shock, blood-loss, primitive surgery, and gangrene, was finally brought down by the tiny, subtle, lockjaw bug. It was not an easy death.

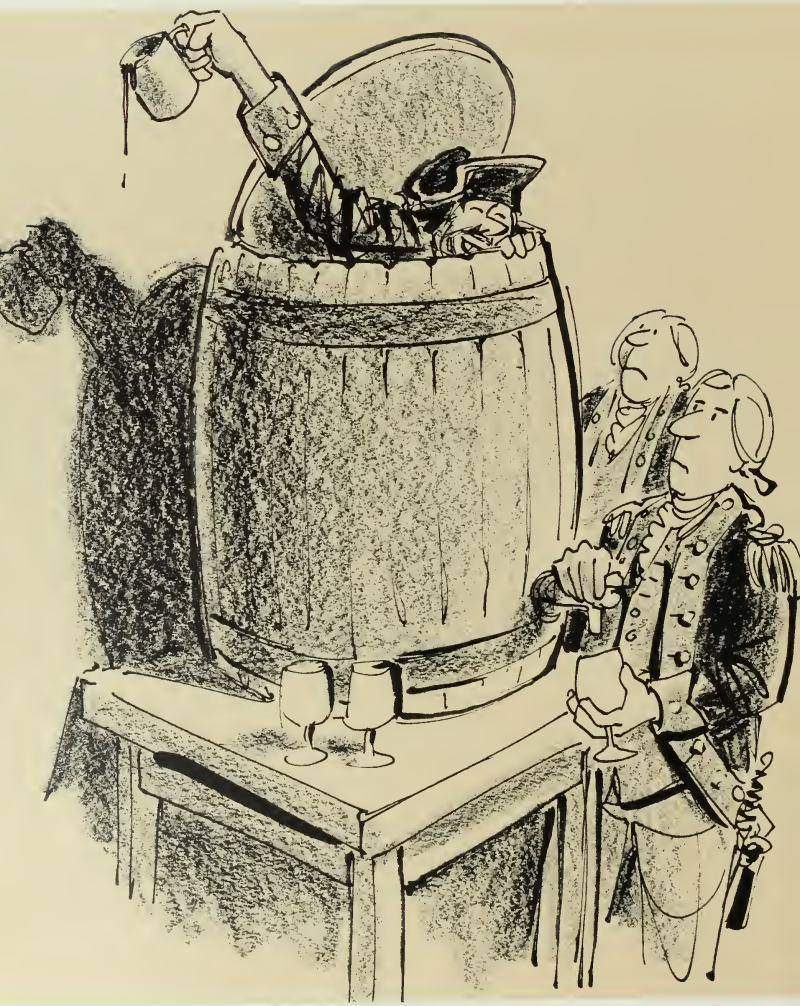
Along with the bullets and pointed weapons, even then ordnance experts had gone far in creating around a gunpowder charge an iron shell which would tear itself into jagged fragments, meant to cause maximum hurt and bleeding. Man, proving once again that he

"Are you sure you want to know what's in it?"

likes to keep his military technology ahead of his healing arts, developed in the exploding cannonball a method of literally blowing himself apart long before he had much idea of how to put himself back together.

In battle, it has always been more desirable to maim an enemy than to kill him outright. You are taking not only your target out of action, but also those who must carry him to aid and those who must look after him. And his groans and screams, to say nothing of his awful appearance, are bad for the morale of his comrades. If he is left out there in the field to holler and die, that has a profound effect upon his friends.

As we said earlier, the art of warfare usually is not a series of brilliant, massive chess maneuvers. It consists of trying to create maximum confusion and hurt in hostile ranks while trying to keep your own miserable, sick, hungry, shivering, ragged show together long enough for the enemy to get into worse shape. Military medics have always performed a useful function in all this. Inept as they might sometimes be, they serve as a reminder that not everybody on a battlefield tries to make death a servant and pain an ally.



"To the Revolution!"

The Inner Revolutionary

Napoleon is supposed to have said that an army marches on its stomach. If he said it, he didn't explain why, and now we have a time-honored bromide which almost everyone accepts in an unthinking way.

The reason soldiers tend to march, and sleep, and work, and meditate on their bellies is that when they aren't actually fighting they don't have much else to occupy their thoughts. And if this is true of the modern trooper, who has huge support forces assigned to nothing but supplying and feeding him, imagine what a preoccupation food and drink must have been to the American Revolutionary soldier. In fact, if he hadn't paid a lot of attention to the subject, he would have starved, most days.

Even the British troops, who were part of a well-organized and established military structure, were expected to do a certain amount of foraging and stealing to supplement formal supplies as they went about their business of empire building and defending. In fact, loot in its various forms, including food, has been a major objective of military activity throughout history. The standard, accepted way of attracting recruits, since nobody ever really wanted to pay soldiers, was to promise them women and loot.

Only in very recent times have rich countries such as our own been able to afford the luxury of sending forth armies with the admonition to concentrate on winning battles and coming straight home, eating and drinking only what's stamped with the Quartermaster Corps' Seal of Approval. And even so, ask the average

veteran of any recent American war if he hasn't done a bit of surreptitious sampling of local goodies in some foreign land. If he is honest, he will probably confess that he did it not once but often, and without benefit of payment. Looting, or "moonlight requisitioning" as many of us eventually came to know it, is an ancient, tolerated, and sometimes approved military vice. You took whatever you needed that wasn't nailed down. If the previous owner was an enemy soldier or civilian so much the better.

This led to some interesting relationships and confrontations between soldiers and civilians. The ideal situation for the Revolutionary soldier, of course, was to be billetted on a well-stocked farm belonging to a Tory. This meant eggs for breakfast and the hen for lunch, cream for afternoon tea and the cow for dinner.

Unfortunately, not all Tories advertised their leanings. A company of infantry would steal a pig from a prosperous-looking farm, assuming, as tired, broke, and hungry soldiers are wont to do, that anybody who lived that comfortably must be a member of the British Establishment. Chances are they later learned to their sorrow that the landowner was a rich and well-connected rebel.

Still, the soldier had to eat. An armed and hungry infantryman has always been able to devise ways to kill livestock illegally and get away with it. Only beginners and fools would claim the animal was felled by a gun going off accidentally. This would reflect upon the shooter's soldierly skills. The proper subterfuge used to this day has been to claim that you thought the target was something else. The pig looked like a deer; you thought the cow was a wild bull moose in rut and on the attack, so you fired in self-defense. Best of all, you could have sworn a sniper was sneaking up on you behind that goose. If this draws suspicion upon you as the owner of a pair of weak eyes, you might get lucky and receive an honorable discharge; otherwise, it shows you are alert and combative, both sterling martial traits, and you could get a promotion.

If the violence of gunfire can be avoided, so much the better for the experienced forager. In his memoirs, *Adventures of a Revolutionary Soldier,* Private Joseph Plumb Martin uses pure trickery for his meal:

"We arrived in the morning at a pretty village called Milltown or Mount Holly . . . I was as near starved with hunger as ever I wish to

"Sir, you said we could shoot deer."

be. I strolled into a large yard where was several sawmills and a gristmill . . . I found nothing there to satisfy my hunger. But there was a barrel standing behind the door with some salt in it. Salt was as valuable as gold with the soldiers. I filled my pocket with it and went out. [*Note: this is a fine example of the moonlight requisition.*] *In the yard and about it was a plenty of geese, turkeys, ducks, and barn-door fowls. I* obtained [*emphasis is mine*] *a piece of an ear of Indian corn, and seating myself on a pile of boards, began throwing the corn to the fowls, which soon drew a fine battalion of them about me.* I might have taken as many as I pleased, but I took up one only, *wrung off its head, dressed and washed it in the stream, seasoned it with some of my salt, and stalked into the first house that fell in my way,* invited myself *into the kitchen, took down the gridiron and put my fowl to cooking upon the coals. The women of the house were all the time going and coming to and from the room. They looked at me but said nothing. . . .* [*Note: obviously they were Tories.*] *When my game was sufficiently broiled, I took it by the* hind *leg* [*his emphasis*] *and made my exit from the house with as little ceremony as I had made my entrance. When I got into the street I devoured it after a* very *short grace and felt as refreshed as the old Indian did when he had eaten his crow roasted in the ashes with the feathers and entrails."*

Private Martin would have been a credit to any military organization; only poultry farmers and British sympathizers would have considered him a miscreant. He took only what he needed, with maybe a little extra salt; he committed no atrocities upon the civilian population, and he made himself fit for battle through a well-prepared and nourishing meal.

Meat, of course, was not always a regular part of the Revolutionary soldier's daily fare. Here is more from our friend Martin:

"While we lay here [*at Valley Forge*] *there was a Continental Thanksgiving ordered by Congress; and as the army had all the cause in the world to be particularly thankful, if not for being well off, at least that it was no worse, we were ordered to participate in it. We had nothing to eat for two or three days previous, except what the trees of the fields and forests afforded us.* [*Note: Presumably, Baron Friedrich von Steuben had a special drill for gathering acorns.*]

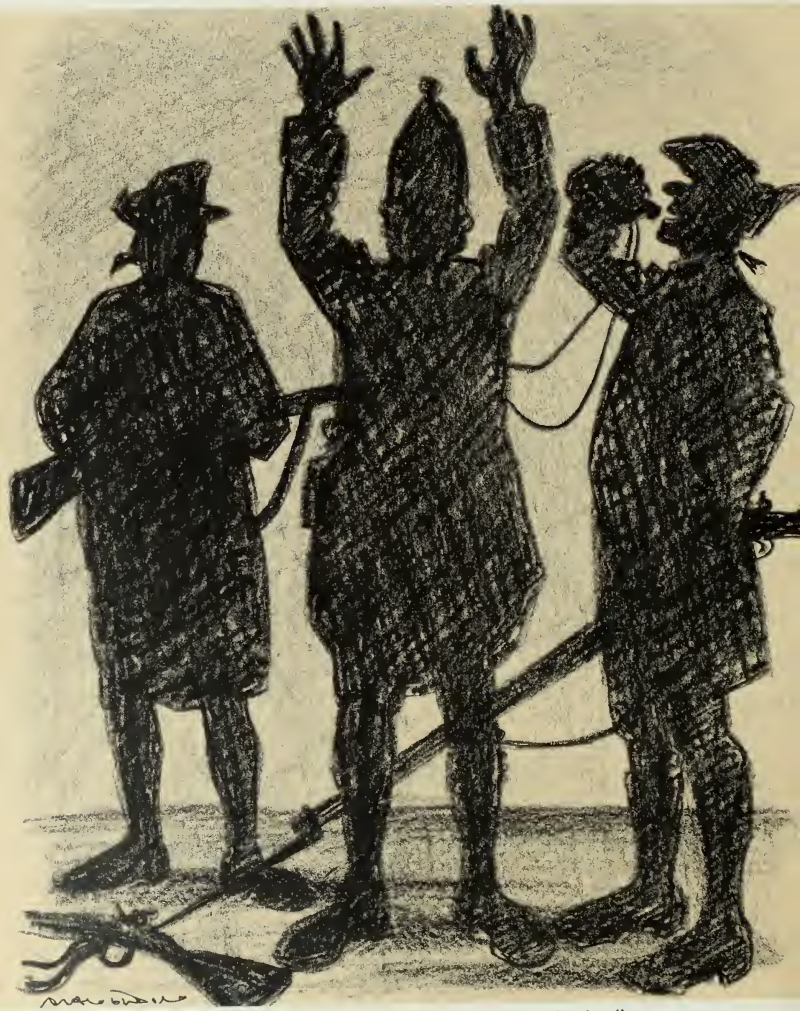
But we must now have what Congress said, a sumptuous Thanksgiving to close the year of high living we had now nearly seen brought to a close. Well, to add something extraordinary to our present stock of provisions, our country, ever mindful of its suffering army, opened her sympathizing heart so wide, upon this occasion, as to give us something to make the world stare. And what do you think it was, reader? Guess. You cannot guess, be you as much of a Yankee as you will. I will tell you; it gave each and every man half a gill *of rice and a* tablespoonful *of vinegar!!"* [*His emphasis.*]

According to most accounts of the day, the average soldier on an average march would simply pick up odds and ends along the way —hastily tearing an ear of corn from a stalk and plucking a handful of turnips from a muddy roadside ditch bank—until he and his friends had enough to fill their pot. They hoped they would have time to build a fire under the pot. Often, they ate their pathetic stew partially cooked or raw. You can imagine the intestinal difficulties suffered by our ancestors in our first army, not only from eating so much raw stuff, but from the fact that it was seldom washed, peeled, or otherwise sanitized. On second thought, maybe we'd better not try to imagine what happened.

The cooking pot, by the way, was issued to every unit of a half-dozen or so. Although small, it was cast-iron and heavy. The task of carrying it, along with the rest of his own bulky gear, usually fell either to the rawest recruit or the group's goof-up. Possibly one of the ways the British and Hessians could track any large Revolutionary unit, even in the dark, was by stumbling over all the iron pots furtively dropped in the roadway.

The Revolutionary soldier's canteen was usually a squat keg, with three-inch staves, a propensity for leaking, and a drinking-hole in one of the staves which was often mouthed by half-dozen or so men. Naturally, canteens, being merely objects for human comfort and survival, were in short supply. The reason they leaked was because they were so often empty that the wood shrank.

You would have thought that with all the human effort and ingenuity that has been poured into military inventions, someone would have devised a decent canteen sometime around the Crusades. A young, adult male, forced to march 20 or 30 miles to a



"Schnapps! We've captured our first Hessian."

summer afternoon's battle, wearing a hot uniform and bearing heavy equipment, should have been entitled, at the very least, to his own, personal, sanitary, comfortably shaped fluid-container with adequate contents.

To this day, the army canteen situation remains a mess. Modern ones are made of aluminum. After some use, weird, foul, little stalagmites and stalactites grow in their gloomy depths. They are totally inhospitable to liquids other than water. What an aluminum canteen will do to the taste of beer, wine, soda-pop, distilled spirits, or any combination of these, is too horrible to describe. Yet what is a thirsty soldier to do when the streams are covered with green mold and he is out of Halazone tablets?

During our Revolution, the British were somewhat ahead of us in canteen development. They issued tin containers, which became prized booty. By the end of the war, the best our side could come up with was a glass bottle sewn into a leather or fabric covering. Clean and leakproof, this thing probably seemed a major breakthrough to Headquarters, and some lieutenant colonel probably got a Legion of Merit for it.

The only trouble with a glass canteen, of course, was that if you fell upon it while under fire you might be dangerously wounded.

It is common, even customary, among armies at war for the rear echelons to grab the best rations, clothing, booze, tobacco, and equipment. Whatever reaches the front has been pretty well picked over. After all, the reasoning goes, why waste good boots on a man who will merely get them muddy, or send him tasty food if he can't cook it properly and probably will be dead before he can digest it? If you're in the rear echelons and steal more than you can use yourself, you know that there are always civilian "businessmen" lurking in the alleys who will pay well for the surplus.

I'm talking here about organized armies and societies in modern times. We've all heard tales of profiteering in Saigon, where men on street corners bought and sold entire shiploads of American supplies, often dealing directly with the enemy who used this black market as a major source of logistical support. In Naples in World War II, convoys manned by uniformed Allied soldiers and officers with all the necessary documents would unload ships at the harbor, then disappear up an alley, never emerging from the other end.

Even the trucks were dismantled and sold piecemeal. And in the Bicentennial year of 1976, a meat packer was charged with bribing U.S. military inspectors and passing off bone and gristle to the Army for sirloin prices.

It's appalling, then, to think what the food and supply situation must have been in Washington's army, especially in the early stages of the Revolution. We jumped into war with very little preparation. Many farmers who were not really Tories at heart still preferred selling produce to the enemy, simply because the British paid better, with more stable currency.

It was temptingly easy for officers who received ration allowances for their men to pocket part of it, or go into cahoots with unscrupulous sellers and take kickbacks from inflated prices. In a letter to a relative, dated August 20, 1775, General Washington said:

"I have already broke one Colo[nel] and five Captains for Cowardice and for drawing more Pay and Provisions than they had Men in their Companies; there is two more Colos. now under arrest, and to be tried for the same offences . . . ."

Wartime confusion offers such varied and easy opportunities for skulduggery at all levels, making honest men into thieves and thieves into tycoons, that it is, and always has been, a miracle that *everybody's* hand isn't into the jam jar. In this respect the British were not much better off than the Americans in the early stages of the Revolution. Here's what Lt. Martin Hunter of the British Light Infantry had to say:

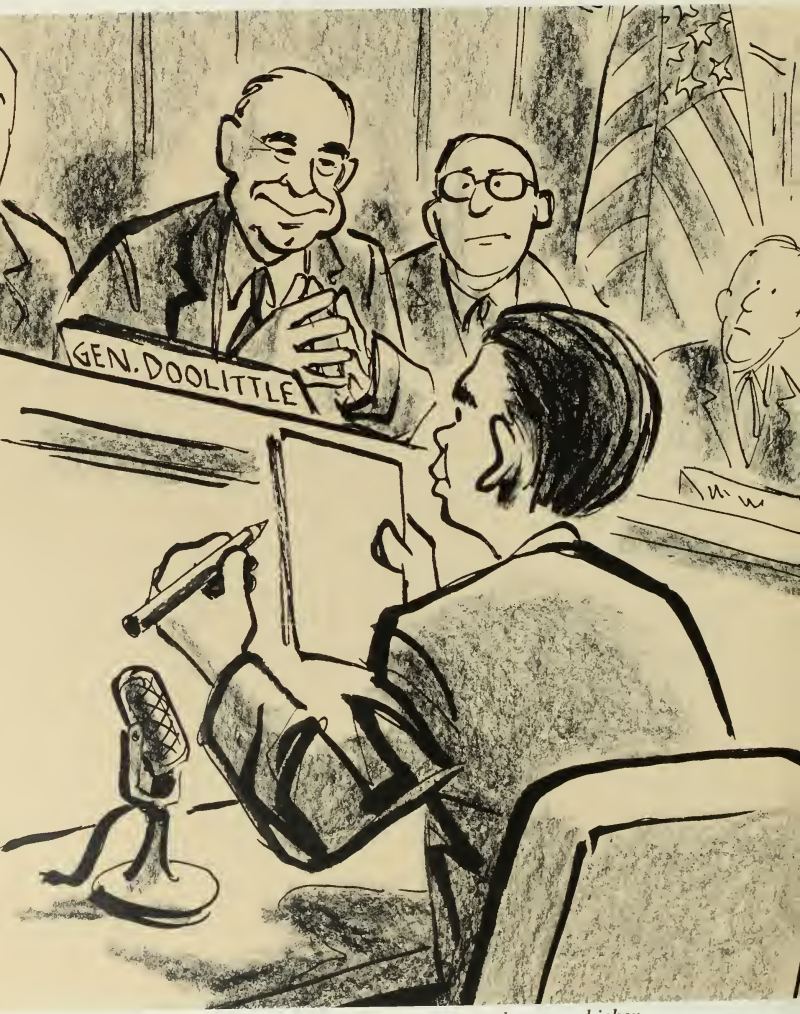
"About a month after the [Bunker's Hill] action I was taken ill, brought on by eating green apples, and obliged to go to Boston; and I am very certain I should not have recovered if it had not been for General Grant's good soup. He was so good as [to] send me a basin every day. Fresh meat was not then to be had for love or money. I was indebted to Captain Brown of the 52nd, who was the General's brigade-major, for this mark of the General's favor. . . . The scarcity of meat at this time was so great that Lord Percy killed a foal, had it roasted, and invited a party to dinner, and Major Musgrave's fat mare was stolen, killed, and sold in the market for beef."

One way in which the American soldier in the Revolution had it all over his 20th century counterpart was that he could drink liquor—when he could find it. Sometimes it was even issued as a daily ration. If there were blue-noses who didn't think our clean-cut lads should sully their minds and innards with strong spirits, they kept their heads down and their mouths shut in those days.

Of course, a fellow sometimes had to do a little conniving to get what was coming to him. Here's Private Martin again, on a schooner, helping to deliver a load of gunpowder:

"There was but a small number of our corps of Sappers and Miners [combat engineers now] in this vessel, with a few artillerists, six or eight officers, and a commissary, who had a small quantity of stores on board, among which was a hogshead containing twenty or thirty gallons of rum. To prevent the men from getting more than their share of the liquor, the officers, who loved a little of the 'good creature' as well as the men, had the bulkhead between the hold and the cabin taken down and placed the hogshead in the cabin, carefully nailing up the partition again, when they thought that they had the exclusive disposal of the precious treasure. But the soldiers were as wily as they, for the very first night after the officers had snugly secured it, as they thought, the head of the cask being crowded against the bulkhead, the soldiers contrived to loosen one of the boards at the lower end, so as to swing it aside, and broached the hogshead on the other head, so that while the officers in the cabin thought they were the sole possessors of its contents, the soldiers in the hold had possession of at least as good a share as themselves."

It is comforting to know that while "Baron" von Steuben was setting one sort of tradition for the American military, Joe Martin and his friends were busy establishing others.



They did not encourage me to draw my chicken.

Had George Asked Me

Most Park Service historians have forgotten more about the Revolution than I have learned in the process of writing this book. After reading the preceding pages, one of them asked me, "All right, Mauldin, if you're so critical of Washington and Baron von Steuben, how would you have done things if you'd been there?"

This took me back some thirty-odd years to hearings of the "Doolittle Commission," set up in Washington shortly after World War II under General Jimmy Doolittle, the renowned pilot who was the first to bomb Japan. The commission's assignment was to investigate the American military system and suggest reforms—particularly in the area of relations between officers and enlisted men.

They called me as one of the first witnesses. I had made something of a reputation for myself with my cartoon jibes at the officer corps in "The Stars and Stripes." Now I had to put up or shut up. Was I merely another rebel against military discipline, or did I really have something to say?

Waiting to testify, I racked my brain trying to remember all the ideas I had cooked up during my five years of servitude about how to overhaul and remodel the Green Machine. What soldier hasn't dreamed of a chance to sound off before such a forum?

Now, of course, the inspirations all eluded me. When my turn in the chair came, the best I could do was blurt out:

"Sir, I think officers and men should continue to eat in separate

messes, with tablecloths and silverware for the officers. I don't want to deprive them of their incentives and privileges. I only want to deprive them of all those chicken breasts."

The members looked at each other, then back at me, patiently.

"Sir," I said to Doolittle, "what I mean is that in my experience the officers are served breast meat and the enlisted man's chicken is all neck. In fact, I once drew a cartoon of the two birds. One was all necks and feet—but no drumsticks. Those were on the other one, the one with all the breasts. If you like, I could . . ."

I waved a pencil, but there was no encouragement. The verbal image had been enough.

"Same with the orange juice out of the Five-in-One rations," I said. "Or the cigarettes. The officers got the Phillip Morris and we got the Twenty Grand. What I'm getting at is that while it probably makes sense for the ranks to have separate facilities—I certainly don't want to encourage any familiarity that might breed contempt—what I think is that *they should all be served from the same pot.*"

The members looked at each other again, this time with some relief. It seemed that I *did* have something in mind, however hazy.

"If the food is lousy," I went on, "the officers should be the first to know. It's one thing for the captain to be told the bread's moldy —it's another thing if he has to eat it himself."

"Anything else, Mr. Mauldin?" Being addressed this way made me nervous. I was all of 23, and had been a mister for a very short time.

"Why, yes, sir," I quavered, "there's the business of off-duty saluting. You know, like in town or someplace."

"Mr. Mauldin, it's not a sign of servitude," a member said. "It's a sign of mutual recognition and respect between men-at-arms. It all started with raising the visor of your hel . . ."

"Yes, sir," I interrupted. "That's what they tell us as recruits. But don't kid yourself—it's a sign of servitude."

"I see," the member muttered.

"I don't mind saluting some jerk fresh out of Officers' Candidate School, even if I know a lot more about the Army than he does," I said, emboldened and warming to my subject. "That is, I don't mind when we're on duty or on a military post. But if I'm walking

down a city sidewalk with my wife and kids and an armload of groceries, and some shavetail comes down the other side of the street . . ."

"We understand, Mr. Mauldin. You don't want to drop the sack of food."

"On duty, the officer is my boss and I'll treat him with respect because he is supposed to know more than I do about this line of work—in theory, anyway. But off-duty, I refuse to feel like a second-class citizen. Officers' checks bounce, too."

"Okay, Mr. Mauldin, we have the common kitchen and no downtown saluting. Any other changes you'd like to see as a result of your long and eventful military career?"

"Sir, I swear I can't think of another damn thing."

Apparently, I was followed by more imaginative and articulate witnesses. The Doolittle hearings resulted in a number of rather sweeping changes in our military. Not only did everybody start eating out of the same pot—they were put at the same table. There was no more off-duty saluting, because suddenly you couldn't spot an officer. They had to wear the same uniforms as soldiers.

Enlisted men sat on court-martial boards. Sergeants were demoted for swearing at subordinates. It was as if the ghost of Baron von Steuben had returned and said,

"So they vant a democratic army? Vell, ve'll give them vun!"

And people started saying to me: "This *was* what you had in mind, wasn't it?"

If I'd had my way, I'd have stopped the pendulum's wild swing before it reached midpoint. Actually, what arrested it was the Korean war, probably just in time to prevent officers being elected by popular vote. The experiment in military egalitarianism foundered in the realities of combat, and everything went back to normal—including the chickens.

All I wanted was to take the gratuitous little humiliations out of soldiering. In the same vein, our Revolutionaries weren't communists, anarchists, or even mild socialists in most cases—they were merely sovereign men who didn't like being treated as servile subjects.

That's why it seems to me that in adopting archaic Prussian ways then and continuing them to the present our military managed to

stay permanently out of step with our society. Dammit, an officer is not automatically a "gentleman by act of Congress."

At least, I have pursued this theory through the certitude of my youth and into the stubbornness of middle age, just as I have always embraced the civil rights cause because it has seemed to me that blacks have been the enlisted men of civilian life. Anything that sets one man up as better than another and is not based on individual merit is, to my mind, un-American and repugnant.

But is it? I mean, is it really un-American? It's just possible that I have been kidding myself, and that enough Old World blood remains in us to cause a certain craving for everything and everybody to be put in place and kept there. Melting pot? Within our cities we have stubbornly ethnic communities beyond whose boundaries the inhabitants dare not stray. We practically crown our presidents, and would have kept several in office forever if they had so wished.

Maybe George Washington, Baron von Steuben, and Douglas MacArthur had a far greater understanding of their constituencies and their troops than I could ever hope to achieve. Even so, I insist that the Spirit of '76, '77, '78, '79, '80, and '81 was best embodied in unlettered, unshaven, sardonic riflemen, whose aim was to get the unpleasantness over and head back to a wilderness full of uncut logs and uncooked game.

I had the honor of knowing some of their descendants a couple of centuries later. The offspring weren't much of an improvement, cosmetically speaking, but their attitudes were still healthy—to my way of thinking. I trust they haven't become an endangered species.

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